

Ranking Member Hall Statement on HR. 3916

Chairman Gordon, thank you for holding this markup and for your co-sponsorship of H.R. 3916. It has been a pleasure working with Members of the Committee to move this bill forward. I'd also like to thank Mr. McCaul for the substantial contributions he has made to the bill.

In his State of the Union address, President Bush emphasized the great importance of securing our nation's borders. I believe this is a crucial issue for this Committee to address and am very pleased to see H.R. 3916 making steady progress. I wrote this bill to ensure that we are meeting the research and technology needs of the over 630,000 brave men and women protecting our borders in the Coast Guard and Border Patrol. We have nearly 7,500 miles of land border with Canada and Mexico, over which half a billion people and over two million rail cars pass per year. In addition we have over 300 ports that see over nine million cargo containers each year.

We have a number of reasons for wanting strict control over this traffic. Drug trafficking, for example, remains a major border protection problem. According to Department of Justice statistics, over 30,000 kilograms of cocaine, heroine, and meth were seized within 150 miles of the US/Mexico border in 2006. I know many Members of this Committee have worked tirelessly to end the scourge of meth in our nation. Yet, success at restricting access to meth ingredients here in the States has led drug dealers to import more across our borders. Stopping the flow of narcotics across our border remains key to our efforts to curb illegal drug use that infects our cities and small towns.

The threat of terrorism also compels us to re-examine our borders. Whether we're talking about foreign groups trying to infiltrate our country or home-grown terrorists seeking weapons and supplies, our borders remain a critical element of our defenses

Finally, in fiscal year 2007, US Border Patrol agents apprehended 880,000 people attempting to enter the country illegally. While I understand the concerns many Members have regarding comprehensive immigration reform, we should not allow that issue to stymie progress deterring terrorists, drug smugglers, and human traffickers.

I introduced H.R. 3916 to reduce our vulnerabilities at the border. The first three sections of the bill ensure that taxpayer dollars are wisely spent by requiring that the Border Patrol can use the technologies created for them and that they are regularly updated to meet their needs.

Section 4 addresses the important issue of safely incorporating unmanned aerial vehicles into the national airspace. Before this promising technology can be used regularly, the safety and effectiveness of "sense and avoid" technologies must be demonstrated. DHS has an excellent opportunity to work collaboratively with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to collect this necessary data.

The tunnel detection program described in Section 5 aims at identifying and stopping smugglers trying to tunnel under other border defenses. Section 6 aims at defeating counterfeiting. The technologies that this program will focus on will ensure that travel, import, and identification documents are safe and secure. Finally, Section 7 urges the Department of Homeland Security to conduct a study on the potential for GPS technology to aid Border Patrol agents in the field.

These provisions will help local, State, and National agents control our borders. This bill will also ensure that we carefully plan and coordinate border technologies so that we protect the American taxpayer. I urge my colleagues to join me and support H.R. 3916 today. I believe this Committee is ideally positioned to strengthen control of our nation's borders through this legislation supporting effective, efficient, and evolving border defenses.